



NORTHERN HIGHLAND AMERICAN LEGION STATE FOREST

**AN OVERVIEW OF THE PLANNING PROCESS,
THE PLANNING FOUNDATION AND THE DRAFT PLAN**



LETTER FROM PROPERTY SUPERINTENDENT

Wisconsinites care deeply about the current and future use of public forests in Wisconsin. The Northern Highland American Legion (NHAL) State Forest is no exception. As the largest state-owned property, the NHAL is a vast and cherished part of Wisconsin's ecological, economic and social past, present and future. The NHAL State Forest covers 225,000 acres located in Vilas, Oneida and Iron counties.

This draft NHAL master plan is designed to inform both general and technical readers about the future use and management of the forest. The department is committed to working with citizens and businesses alike to manage Wisconsin's state forests in a sustainable manner for current and future generations—an approach that incorporates ecological, economic and social values. I hope the information and vision in this plan will encourage enthusiasm and constructive discussion.

The NHAL state forest is important to many people because it has the unique ability to meet many different needs. The forest generates employment and supports the economic well being of rural and urban communities alike, through the production of forest products we use daily and the recreation and tourism generated by the fantastic forest and lakes setting within the forest. The forest provides opportunities for a diverse array of recreation such as hiking, snowmobiling, biking and hunting, as well as the opportunity to simply sit quietly and enjoy its natural beauty. In addition, the forest cleans our air and water, provides habitat for a wide range of plant and animal species, and helps us sustain our quality of life.

Virtually all elements of the forest have seen increasing demands in the last decade—demands for ecological protection, forest production, and recreation activity. These demands have potential positive impacts—if development and use is properly planned and managed. Unplanned use and management could, however, overwhelm the Northern Highland American Legion State Forest's unique ability to provide the ecological, economic, and social benefits that are so highly valued by current residents, visitors, and businesses.

How is it possible to understand all of the various dimensions of the NHAL and meet the increasing demands? What is the future of the forest and what policies will ensure its long-term sustainability?

The Department of Natural Resources, in partnership with Wisconsin citizens, businesses and visitors, provides this plan as the basis for that discussion and the future use and management of the Northern Highland American Legion State Forest.

Your feedback on the plan is welcomed and encouraged. With over 225,000 acres of land in the heart of the "Northwoods", Wisconsinites have a real opportunity to contribute to sustainable forestry. Together we can ensure that the NHAL State Forest continues to provide ecological, economic and social benefits to future generations.



Dennis Leith
State Forest Superintendent



PURPOSE OF WISCONSIN'S STATE FORESTS

State forests contribute to local and statewide economies and a healthy environment. Forest managers practice sustainable forestry to ensure that the forest can provide a range of ecological, economic, and social benefits now and for years to come. Management plans are based on the land's ecological capability and are designed to maintain its natural communities and ecosystems. Management of the Wisconsin State Forest System is guided by Wisconsin Statute 28.04.

PLANNING STATE FORESTS

A state forest master plan spells out how the land will be managed, used and developed; how it will look; and what benefits it will provide. It defines the recreational uses, forestry and other land management practices or aspects of the property's future use and development. The master planning process includes both the management plan and an environmental impact statement. Master plans are guided by administrative code NR 44.

Beginning with the first purchase of land in 1905, planning and managing Wisconsin's state forests has been an evolving process. The initial management plans, as written in the early 1950s, focused primarily on timber management and watershed protection. Major revisions in the plans written in the 1970s and 1980s incorporated new knowledge and reflected changing management techniques, issues, social needs, and values.

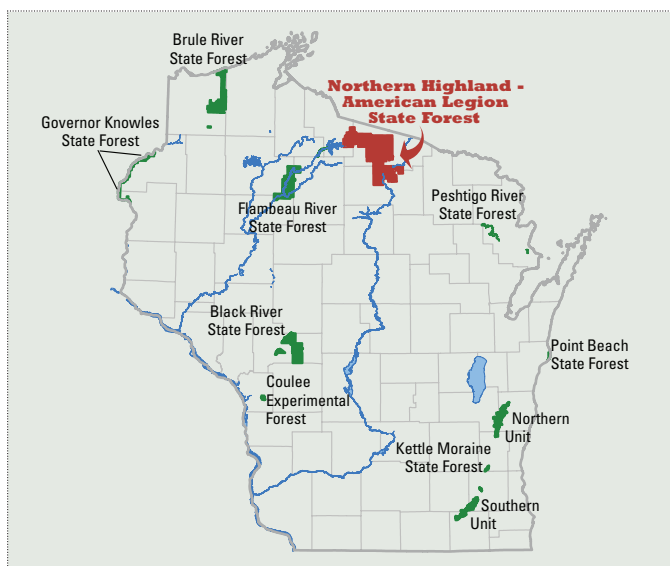
The current planning effort has evolved into a sustainable forestry-based approach focusing on ensuring the ecological, economic, and social aspects of the forest environment for current and future generations.

While earlier management plans were scheduled to be revised every ten years, this plan and future forest plans will be continuously revised and updated with a formal, rigorous review every 15 years. This process will allow for greater public comment and input, and permit the Department to better anticipate and respond to changing issues, technologies, and forest conditions.

SUSTAINABLE FORESTRY

From its inception, the NHAL State forest master plan has been driven by a strong commitment to sustainable forestry. Forest practices have addressed aspects of sustainability for decades, but "sustainable forestry" is a relatively new concept. While individual definitions of sustainable forestry may differ slightly in their details, there is generally broad agreement that sustainable forestry focuses on meeting the environmental, economic and social needs of current generations while protecting the ability of future generations to meet these needs as well.

Wisconsin State Forests



The Northern Highland American Legion (NHAL) State Forest is located in northern Wisconsin in Vilas, Oneida, and Iron Counties. For many people, this region epitomizes the “northwoods” with its vast forests, abundant lakes, wetlands, streams, and diverse recreational opportunities.

More than two million visitors come each year to enjoy the area’s natural beauty. Whether camping or staying in a resort or vacation home, visitors have long considered the NHAL a major vacation destination area.

RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES IN THE NHAL STATE FOREST

Water-based recreation in the state forest is supported by the numerous streams and rivers that create a network between the hundreds of lakes. Sport fishing, along with swimming, water skiing, canoeing and sight seeing top the list.

Land-based recreation is available in both developed and primitive areas, as well as in spots in which motorized vehicles are not allowed. The NHAL supplies a variety of trails for hiking and snowshoeing. It also provides interpretive nature trails and mountain bike trails.

The NHAL is host to many different kinds of camping opportunities. Campers seeking the full outdoor experience have the opportunity to stay in undeveloped areas without facilities along designated backpacking trails. Those seeking more

amenities can stay at modern campgrounds with modern facilities, such as running water and shower houses.

THE FOREST SUPPORTS WISCONSIN’S WOOD PRODUCTS INDUSTRY

The state forest provides an abundance of high quality forest products—products on which people depend. The forest helps to support the state’s \$20 billion forest products industry that employs almost 100,000 people in Wisconsin. Thirty percent of the region’s economic output and 27% of the region’s jobs are tied to either wood products or tourism. The annual production of forest products on the NHAL averages over 40,000 cords and 2 million board feet.

PROVIDES HABITATS AND PROTECTS WATER QUALITY

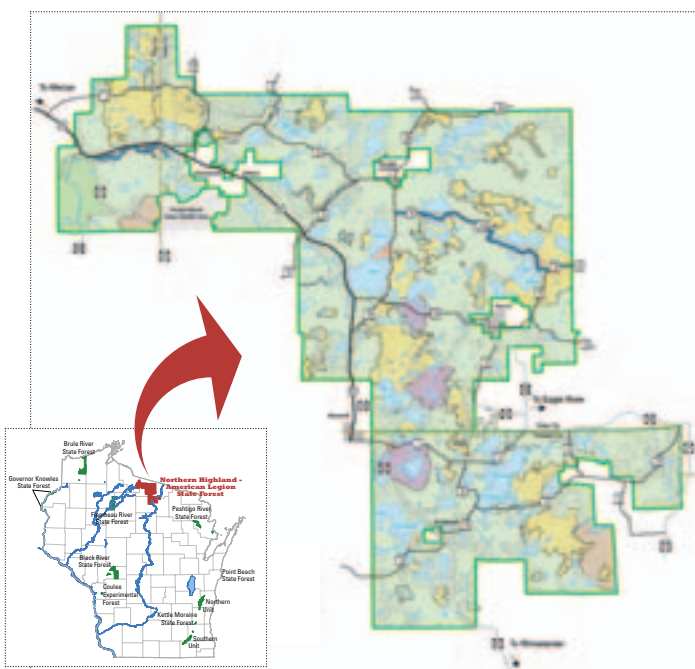
The Northern Highland American Legion State Forest is known for its many lakes and the diversity of its surrounding forests. Vast stands of white and red pines, mixed with northern hardwoods, dominated the original forest. Today most of the forest is young to middle-aged with only a few areas containing the same characteristics as the older forest. Many of the wetlands, lakes, and forested areas are parts of a complex ecosystem that helps protect water quality and provides habitat for fish, birds, insects and plants, in addition to many rare species.

The forest supports about 100 rare plant and animal species. Eighty-seven of the species identified are Species of Special Concern, 12 are State Threatened species and 2 are classified as State Endangered Species. Seventy-nine percent of the rare plants and 75% of rare animals dwell in aquatic habitats, which predominate in this part of the state.

A PRICELESS ASSET

The Northern Highland American Legion State Forest represents one of the largest expanses of public forestland in Wisconsin. It provides bountiful recreational opportunities, supports jobs and Wisconsin’s economy and protects myriad plant and animal species. The NHAL is truly a priceless public asset.

NH-AL State Forest



The Northern Highland American Legion State Forest

The Northern Highland American Legion State Forest Master Plan articulates a shared vision for the future use and management of the forest and lays out the objectives and policies to achieve the vision. The plan, based on over five years of assessment and planning, is designed to sustain the ecological, economic, and social benefits valued by the citizens of Wisconsin.

This overview provides a summary of the planning process, the plan itself, and the next steps. The plan updates the 1982 Northern Highland American Legion State Forest Master Plan.

OVERVIEW OF PLANNING PROCESS

The process for updating the Northern Highland American Legion State Forest Master Plan began in 1997. Past management plans, extensive ecological, economic, social assessments and public input provided the foundation for future management.

The NHAL planning process consists of the following steps:

- Phase 1:** Identify Issues and Review Proposed Public Involvement Plan
- Phase 2:** Establish Proposed Vision and Goals
- Phase 3:** Develop and Evaluate Proposed Alternatives and Environmental Impacts
- Phase 4:** Write the Proposed Master Plans and the Complete Environmental Impact Statement
- Phase 5:** Natural Resources Board (NRB) Review and Approval
- Phase 6:** Plan Implementation

CONTENTS AND PLAN ORGANIZATION

The State Forest Master Plan is organized into six chapters and provides the details on how the forest will be managed, including sections that contain an introduction, vision, goals, objectives, management prescriptions, and environmental impacts. This information provides a basic understanding of the directions the Department intends to go concerning the management of the Northern Highland American Legion State Forest. In addition, operating manuals and other documents are referenced and attached via links on the Internet. Together, with its reference materials, the plan provides a comprehensive source of information and guidance on state forest management issues for the Department and the public.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT AND ALTERNATIVES

In addition to the plan, the document includes a draft analysis of the projected impacts if the draft plan were fully implemented. An environmental analysis provides an aid for the



public to use when reviewing major Department proposals and to provide information to agency decision-makers regarding the effects of proposals before them.

The draft environmental analysis determined the proposed plan would cause no significant adverse physical, biological, cultural or economic impacts. Overall, the proposed plan would have a positive long-term impact on the quality of the human environment. The analysis found that implementation of the proposed plan would:

- Have significant positive ecological benefits by maintaining and expanding protection of critical ecological communities, habitats and species,
- Have a positive economic impact on local tourism and forest product industry,

- Have a positive social/recreational impact by maintaining a full range of recreational opportunities, expanding facilities for high demand uses, and through maintaining the forest's high quality scenic values,
- Have neutral to positive effects upon local governments and taxpayers, as state aids-in-lieu-of-taxes off-set the property tax revenues that are not collected.

ON-LINE DRAFT PLAN AND BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Throughout the planning process, a tremendous amount of information about the forest was compiled. The Internet is the principal media used for dissemination of the NHAL forest plan. The draft plan and additional information can be found on the Wisconsin DNR Forestry web site:
http://dnr.wi.gov/master_planning/nhal/



From its inception, the Northern Highland American Legion State Forest master plan has been characterized by a strong commitment to public participation and sustainable forestry. The draft State Forest Master Plan provides the details on how the forest will be managed, developed and used. The draft plan also includes an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) of the proposed plan and alternatives.

VISION FOR THE NORTHERN HIGHLAND AMERICAN LEGION STATE FOREST

The Northern Highland American Legion State Forest is a dynamic environment composed of many biological communities that contribute to diverse ecosystems in the region and state. The forest provides a range of cultural, economic, and ecological benefits for current and future generations. The unique, aesthetic character of the forest and the quality of its water are perpetuated and enhanced. The forest is managed in consultation with federal, tribal, and other local governments, and with those who care about the forest, including those who live, work and recreate in and around it.

GOALS OF THE NHAL STATE FOREST

- Provide a diversity of terrestrial and aquatic biological communities, including a range of forest types and age classes, with emphasis on communities that are special to the Northern Highland American Legion State Forest.
- Maintain and enhance aesthetic qualities of the Northern Highland American Legion State Forest.
- Identify and protect endangered and threatened resources, historic properties, and areas of geological, archaeological or cultural significance.
- Provide a variety of renewable forest products consistent with forest capabilities.
- In consultation with tribal governments, provide for the availability and enhancement of treaty resources.
- Provide a variety of recreational settings and activities, ranging from primitive to developed, consistent with resource capabilities.
- Provide a diversity of hunting, trapping, fishing and wildlife viewing opportunities.
- Protect and enhance wild resource values such as solitude, remoteness, and the sights and sounds of a natural environment.
- Resolve or minimize conflict among different types of recreational uses and among various types of forest uses and management activities.
- Provide a variety of educational opportunities for state forest visitors.





PLAN HIGHLIGHTS

- Maintains and expands protection of critical ecological communities, habitats and species.
- Maintain existing forest types, aspen and pine are two prominent forest covers types that will be maintained.
- Support regional and state economies by providing resources and jobs related to the forest products industry and tourism industry.
- Proposed scenic management areas, including Manitowish river, rustic road along County Highway K, and scenic lakes.
- Proposals for new and expanded Natural Areas.
- Maintain wild and wilderness lake designations and create new scenic lakes.
- Proposed All Terrain Vehicle demonstration use area. An area 3,325 acres in size with the potential to support 8 to 12 miles of trails.
- Proposed increase in developed and primitive camping facilities, including canoe and lake sites.
- Proposed increase in hiking, biking, and nature trails.
- Maintain quantity and quality of snowmobile trails.
- Establishes 28 State natural areas.
- Identifies 65,000 acres for property expansion.
- Plans to control the introduction and spread of invasive species.

Keeping pace with natural and societal changes, conditions and values requires an understanding of the forest's complexity and the ability to continually adapt to a growing and changing population.

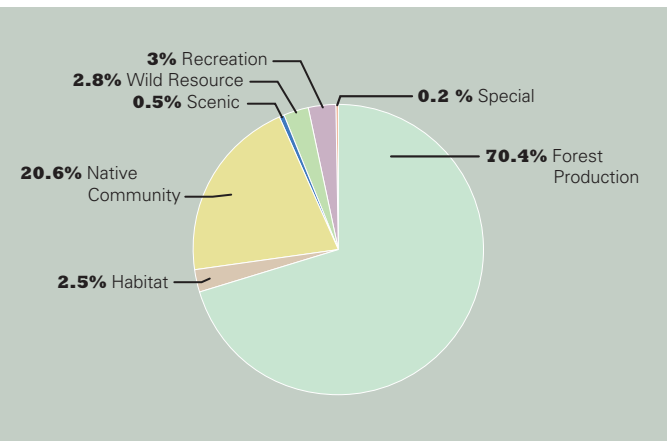
A number of key issues have been identified by the public from a variety of sources, including public meetings, written comments, and several advisory committees. These provided the Department with many recommendations and viewpoints to consider in the planning process.

By far, the largest number of comments centered on recreation and user access to state forest lands. Other issues included wild and natural area management, timber management and forest cover type changes. These comments were considered, and the goals and objectives were modified to the extent possible. The Department recognizes that not all potential forest uses and values can be met compatibly on all areas of the state forest, but is committed to accommodating the public's needs and desires and minimizing conflict among its users whenever possible.

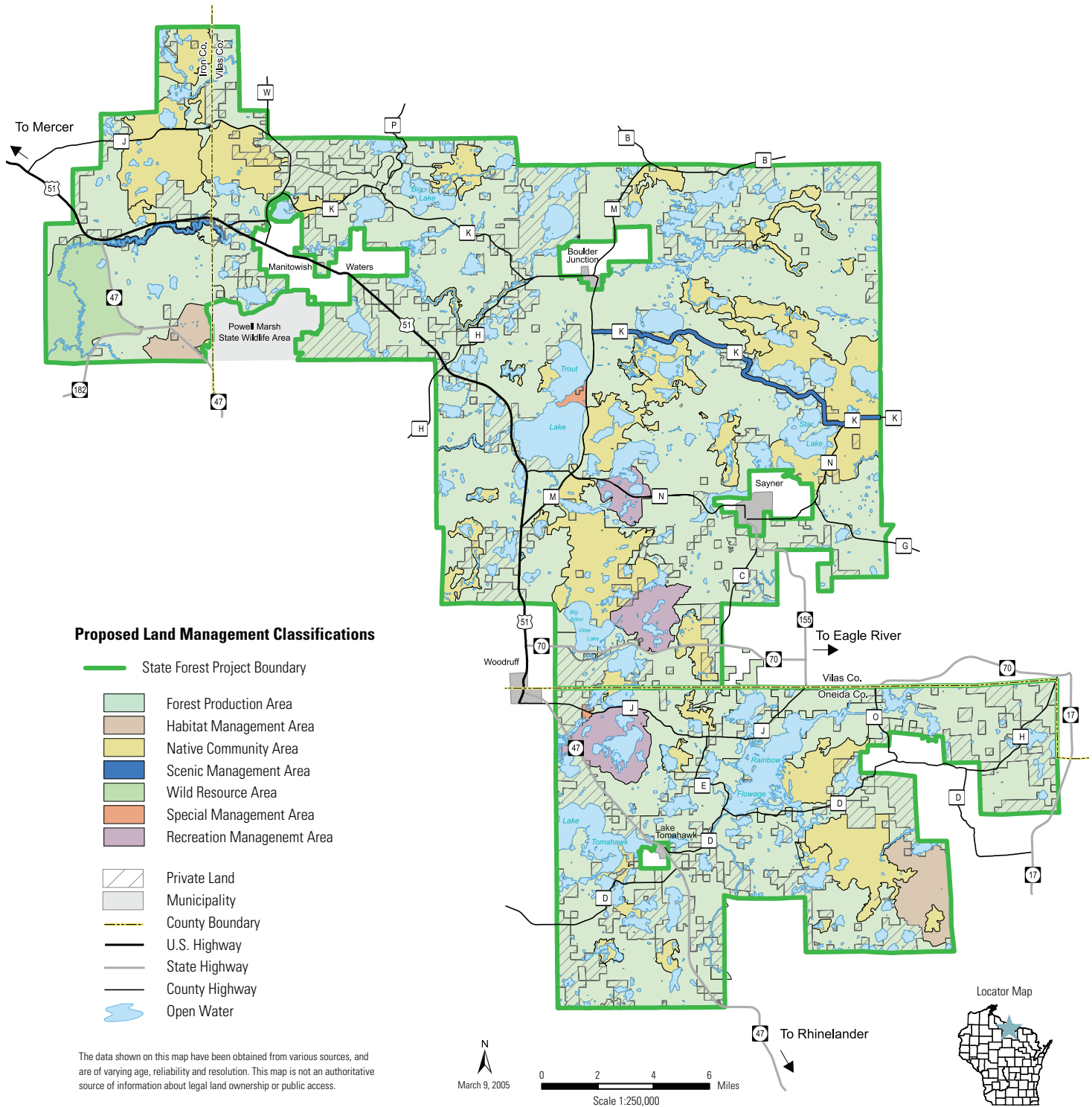
LAND USE AND MANAGEMENT

The NHAL land base is divided into seven land management classifications, or uses. Each Classification represents the primary management focus; however, many secondary purposes are also met in most cases. The proposed land management classifications are shown on the NHAL map provided in this overview document.

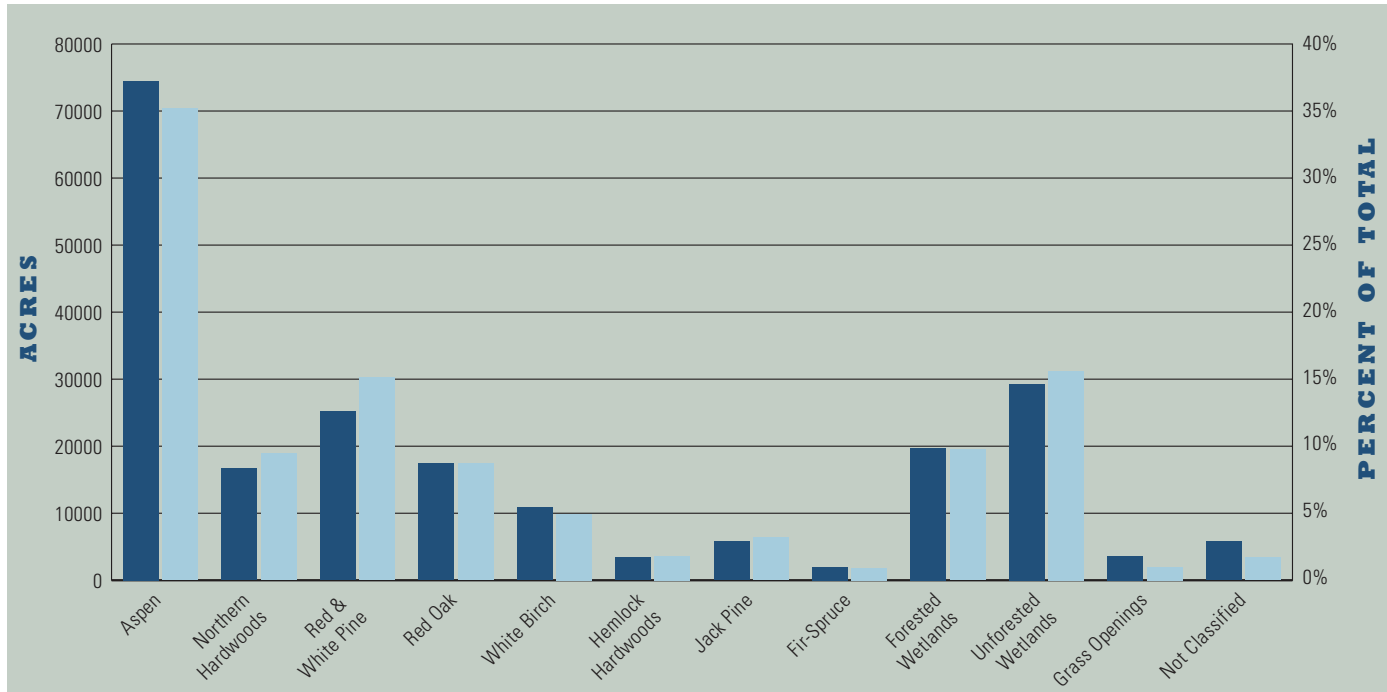
NHAL State-owned Land Management Classifications



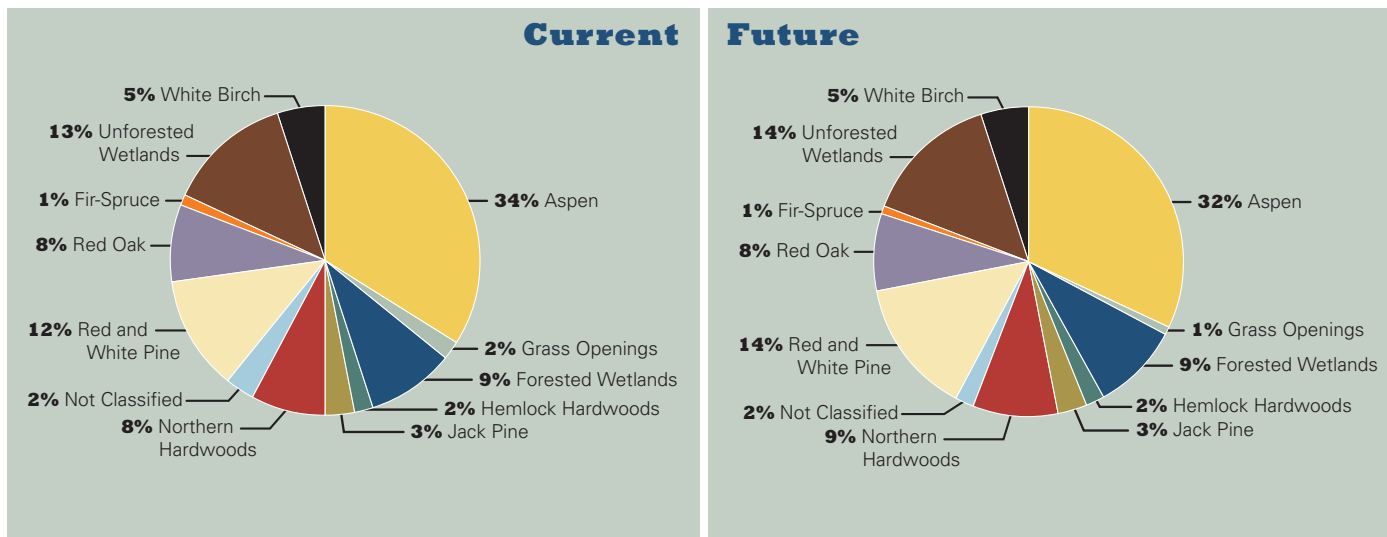
Land Management Classifications



Current and Future Forest Cover Types



NHAL Covertypes



FOREST COVER

About three quarters of the NHAL is upland. The forest is a complex mosaic of forest types, age classes and structures. Currently the NHAL forest is dominated by aspen (aspen is the dominant tree species in 34% of the forest stands), with fewer stands dominated by red pine and white pine, red oak, northern hardwoods, white birch, jack pine, white pine, and hemlock-hardwood.

The composition of the forest would likely change very little over the next 50 years. Aspen stands are projected to decline by 2% with a corresponding increase in red/white pine stands. Northern hardwoods would increase by 1%. Overall, the largest change would be a subtle, gradual shift in the composition of mixed forest stands. The predominant change would be a slight increase in red and white pine with a corresponding decline in other species, particularly aspen/birch. A strong component of mixed forest stands would remain, though they would become fewer in number.



RESTORING NATIVE COMMUNITIES AND HIGH CONSERVATION VALUE FORESTS

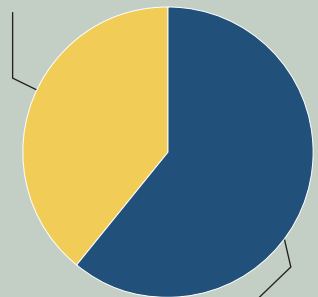
The NHAL forest is relatively young. Significant planting and natural regeneration in the early 1900's shaped the forest types we see today. **Only 3% of the forest is more than 120 years old.** The proposed plan identifies areas capable of supporting old-growth forests, and identifies objectives to encourage an increase in old-growth acreage where appropriate. Old-growth forest management is proposed for an estimated 22,290 acres. These are all on upland sites. Of this acreage, 61% (13,500 acres) would be actively managed and 39% (8,790 acres) would be passively managed. The forest reconnaissance data shows the NHAL's total upland acreage (state-owned land) to be 166,125 acres. **Therefore, approximately 13% of the NHAL's upland acreage would be under old-growth management.**

Land management objectives are achieved through active and passive management. Identifying and maintaining high conservation value forests are an important goal of the plan. Passive management is a tool that can be used to meet the plan's objectives. Passive management will continue in all areas, with the majority occurring in the Native Community and Recreation areas with smaller amounts in wild resource, wilderness and wild lakes. Under a proposed plan seven percent of the upland forest will be passively managed. This seven percent is found in wilderness and wild lakes, wild resource areas and old-growth ecological reference sites.

Old-Growth Management

22,290 total old-growth acres

39%
Passive Management
8,790 acres



61%
Active Management
13,500 acres

13% of the NHAL's upland forest would be under old-growth management.

STATE NATURAL AREAS (SNAs)

The NHAL State Forest has a number of native communities that have regional and statewide significance. Many of the most important sites would be designated as State Natural Areas (SNAs). Under the draft plan the NHAL would have 28 SNAs totaling 23,934 acres. This includes existing and new SNAs. Thirty six percent of the acreage is upland, 54 percent is wetlands, with water making up the remaining 10 percent. Approximately 88 percent of the SNA acreage would be passively managed and 12 percent of the SNA acreage would be actively managed. Much of the passively managed area would be old-growth forest management. Ten of the SNAs have active management. Currently there are thirteen scientific natural areas totaling 2,640 acres and six public use natural areas totaling 312 acres on the NHAL.

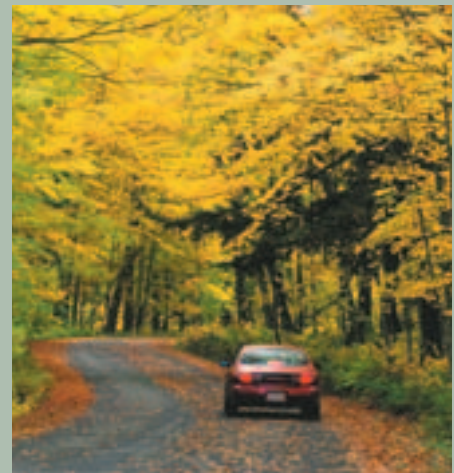
**INVASIVE SPECIES**

Invasive plant species have infested many acres of land on the NHAL. They can invade healthy native ecosystems and in some instances radically alter system functions and processes. The majority of invasive plant species were established at homestead sites. The spread and introduction of invasive species is also being caused by recreational vehicles, hiking boots, and other recreational equipment. Recreational equipment such as motor boats are also the likely spread of aquatic species like Eurasian water milfoil found in many lakes within the state forest. There are several ways that invasive species are being addressed in the draft plan. The draft plan calls for conducting inventory and monitoring efforts as well as control efforts through a variety of methods such as bio-control beetles, chemical treatment, and manual removal.

**SCENIC MANAGEMENT**

The proposed plan would continue the protection of the Forest's scenic waters and roadways. Shorelines around designated wild and wilderness lakes would be passively managed. The shore areas around other lakes would be managed with the maintenance of scenic qualities a high priority.

The scenic qualities of the Rustic Road # 60 (a portion of Vilas Co. Hwy K) and the main highway corridors within the NHAL would be maintained and, over the long-term, enhanced by the management proposed in the plan. Scenic values are set as primary management objectives for these areas. Management prescriptions call for an emphasis on maintaining or establishing longer-lived mixed forest species, and minimizing the visual impacts of harvest activities near these roadways. Examples of these special aesthetic management actions include eliminating slash, not allowing long landings near the road, using special alignments for logging roads to reduce their visibility.



RECREATION HIGHLIGHTS

To accommodate the increasing demand for forest-based recreation, the forest is planning to add over 200 campsites, between 25 to 33 miles of hiking trails and a new education and interpretation center. A new paved 1.6-mile bike trail will help connect forest visitors to the surrounding townships. A regional snowmobile trail system will continue to allow access to the 400 miles of snowmobile trails within the property. The current number of miles of logging roads will be maintained allowing access into the forest by foot or truck. The forest will also continue the land use agreements with private organizations and local townships providing access to 280 acres of state forest land. Motorized access to lakes will increase as a result of changes in lake designations.

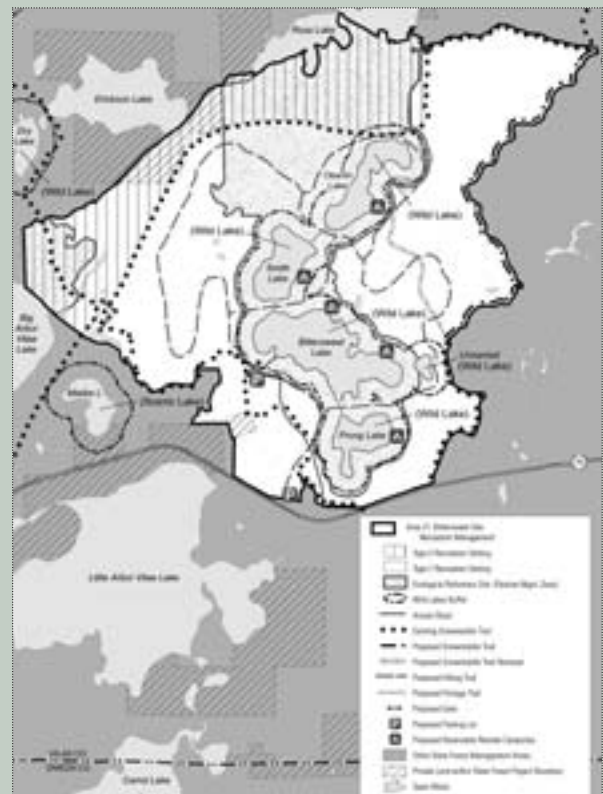
Campground additions include more than 100 new modern campsites and over 70 rustic campsites. New primitive and remote camping will include 15 to 18 new reservable remote campsites. An addition of 10 canoe campsites as well as increased opportunities for backpack camping is also planned.



BITTERSWEET RECREATION AREA

The draft plan identifies the Bittersweet Lake area for providing quiet recreation year round. The 2,553 acre Bittersweet area lies just a few miles north and east of the towns of Woodruff and Minocqua, off State Highway 70.

This area would be managed as a non-motor area with the addition of primitive campsites and trails. Except for lake access, roads in this area would be closed to motor vehicles. Limited snowmobile trails that can not be rerouted to outside the area would remain open. Much of the land surrounding in the area (1,136 acres, including wild lakes) would be passively managed.



**SEMI-REMOTE AND
NON-MOTOR RECREATION**

The previous master plan designated areas as “wild areas”. Two of these wild areas are the Partidge-Nixon and Frank Lake wild areas. These areas have been managed for remote, quiet recreation allowing some roads and snowmobiles. Under the draft plan these areas would be designated as “Semi-Remote Recreation” rather than wild areas. The objectives of the area would stay the same and public access would not change. Combustion motors would not be allowed on the lakes in this area the boundaries are shifted to exclude lands near lakes with motorized use. The wild area classification no longer exists due to recent changes in the Departments Land Management Classification System.

**ACCESS**

Under the plan, access (both motorized and non-motorized) for hunting, trapping, wildlife viewing and other recreational uses would remain generally unchanged from current conditions. There would be some shifts in the location of designated non motor areas. The existing miles of roads open for motor vehicle use forest wide would generally remain unchanged, although specific roads may open and close over time due to timber harvesting activities.

WATER RESOURCES

All land and recreation management activities would continue to protect the water quality and scenic amenities of the many lakes and rivers.

Many lakes are protected by limiting motor access and limiting land management around the lake. Thirty-eight lakes have been upgraded to include some type of restriction on water access as well as modified land management activities.

Lake Classifications in the NHAL

Lake Protection	Proposed Total
No motors allowed	40
Public non-motor	18
Electric-motor	24.5

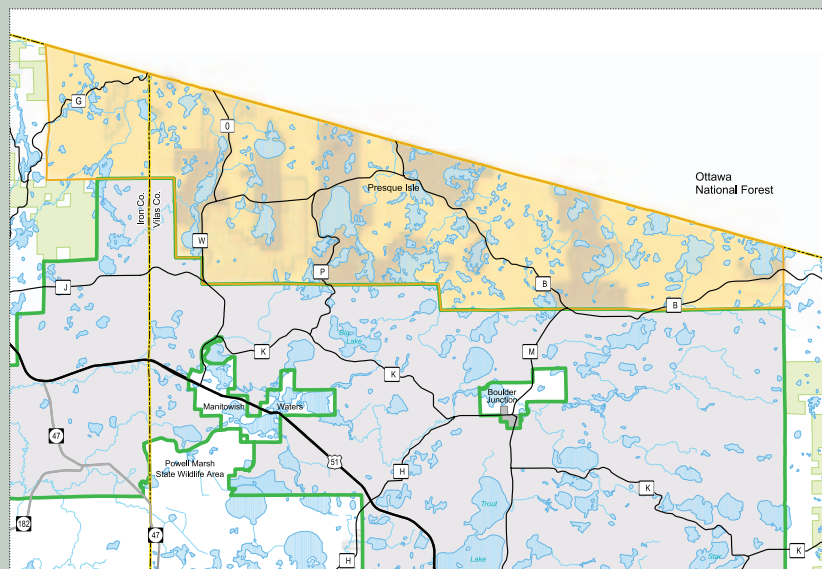
Land Management Overlay Zones	Proposed Total
Wilderness Lakes	6
Wild Lakes	34
Scenic Lakes	30



BOUNDARY EXPANSION

The boundary expansion area consists of 65,000 acres north of the existing forest boundary. The expansion is based on the number of high quality aquatic natural communities and patches of old-growth areas. By expanding north, the forest will also be able to preserve and protect the biological diversity in this region. Because this area also consists of the highest concentrations of lakes in the world, there is an opportunity for the forest to keep up with increasing recreation demands by identifying areas suitable for new campgrounds and trails. Not shown on the map below are two small expansions to the south.

Proposed Boundary Expansion



MOTORIZED TRAIL USE

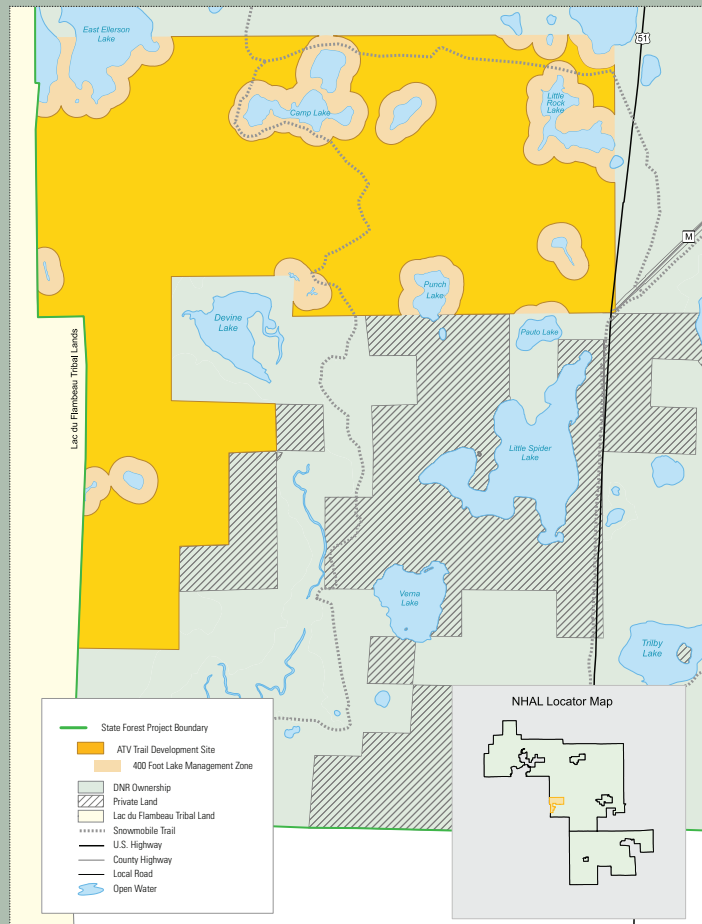
In response to increasing demand for motorized recreation, the forest identified a potential 3,325 acre area, located in the southwest corner of Vilas County as an experimental ATV demonstration site. This area could support approximately 8 to 12 miles of trails. The area would emphasize the importance of education on annual trail monitoring and the effectiveness of proper trail design for sustainability.

The draft plan proposes a new and unique type of motored recreation trail experience for riders of varied skill levels, interests and ages that combines traditional recreation and education with ATV riding. The trail would pioneer innovative management techniques, demonstrate, evaluate, and promote safe and ethical motorized recreation.

The objectives are to develop a state-of-the-art recreational “demonstration” and “education” trail where:

- The trail serves as an educational site to train ATV owners, DNR and other agency staff about:
 - “trail skills” – riding skills, safety and rescue, ethics and etiquette.
 - “trail management” – maintenance and development, policy and enforcement.
 - “trail aesthetics” – design & construction, natural resource awareness and appreciation.
 - “trail conservation” – basic conservation concepts, resource stewardship.
- The trail is a field laboratory, serving as a test area where new trail structures, design techniques and trail use are pioneered and researched.
- A variety of traditional recreation and education opportunities are integrated with the trail’s design, including interpretation of forestry management and ecological concepts.
- The trail is evaluated and monitored regularly for effectiveness of trail design and ecological affects.
- The trail is a cooperative effort of the Department of Natural Resources, citizens, recreation groups and other public or private organizations.
- The proposed trail is developed to comply with Wisconsin’s evolving criteria for ATV trails on state properties.

Proposed ATV Trail Development Site



STAKEHOLDER INPUT

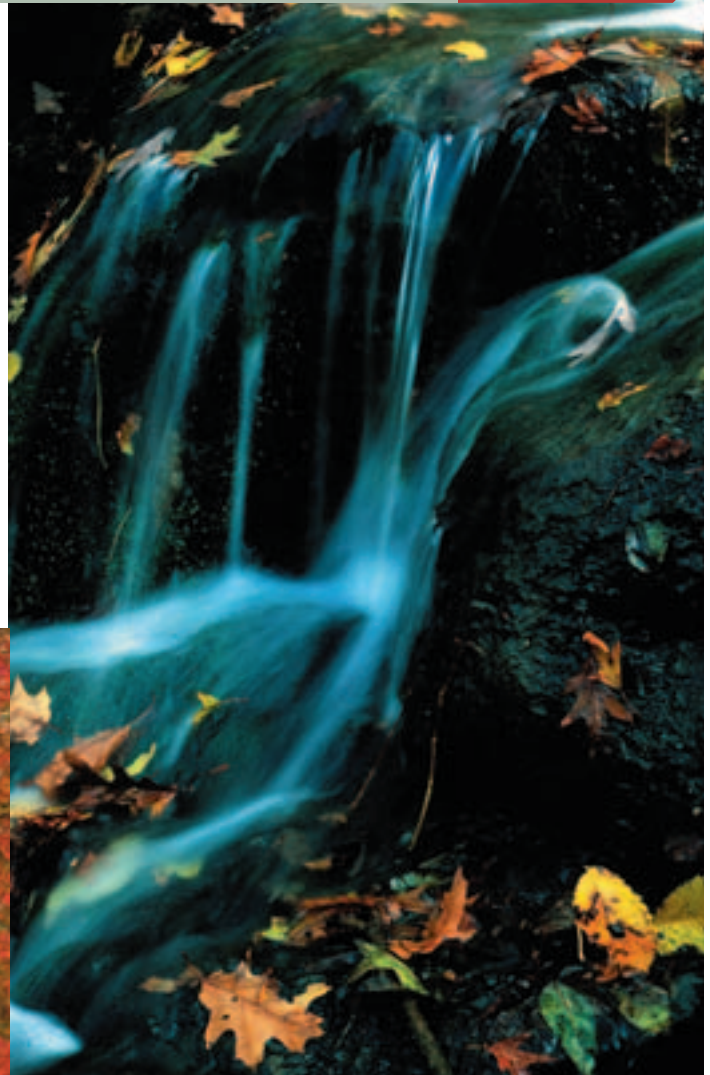
Throughout the development of this plan, forest managers and planners have continuously been in contact with the public through progress reports, public meetings, web site updates and statewide news releases. The revised plan calls for maintaining and increasing the opportunities for stakeholders to have input.



SUSTAINING A LEGACY - MASTER PLAN UPDATES

People rely on the forest for their livelihoods, recreation, spiritual renewal, a vast array of forest products, and essential ecological functions that preserve clean air and water, as well as diversity.

Whereas previous management plans were scheduled to be revised at 10-year intervals, this plan and future plans will be revised and updated continually with a formal rigorous review every 15 years. This process will allow for increased opportunities for public comment and input, and allow the Department to more effectively anticipate and respond to changing issues, understandings, technologies, and forest conditions. State Forest management will be guided by the practice of **sustainable** forestry.



GET INVOLVED

Please visit the following Web sites for the full Northern Highland American Legion Draft Master Plan, more detail about the planning process, how to comment and public meeting and hearing schedules please go to:

http://dnr.wi.gov/master_planning/nhal/

For questions regarding the draft plan,
please contact:

Department of Natural Resources
Attention: Dennis Leith
8770 Highway J
Woodruff, WI 54568
leithd@dnr.state.wi.us
715-358-9225

To request a copy of the Northern Highland American
Legion State Forest Draft Master Plan, please contact:

Department of Natural Resources
NHAL Master Plan
107 Sutliff Avenue
Rhineland, WI 54501-3349
robert.dall@dnr.state.wi.us
715-365-8993

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DNR Forestry Web site

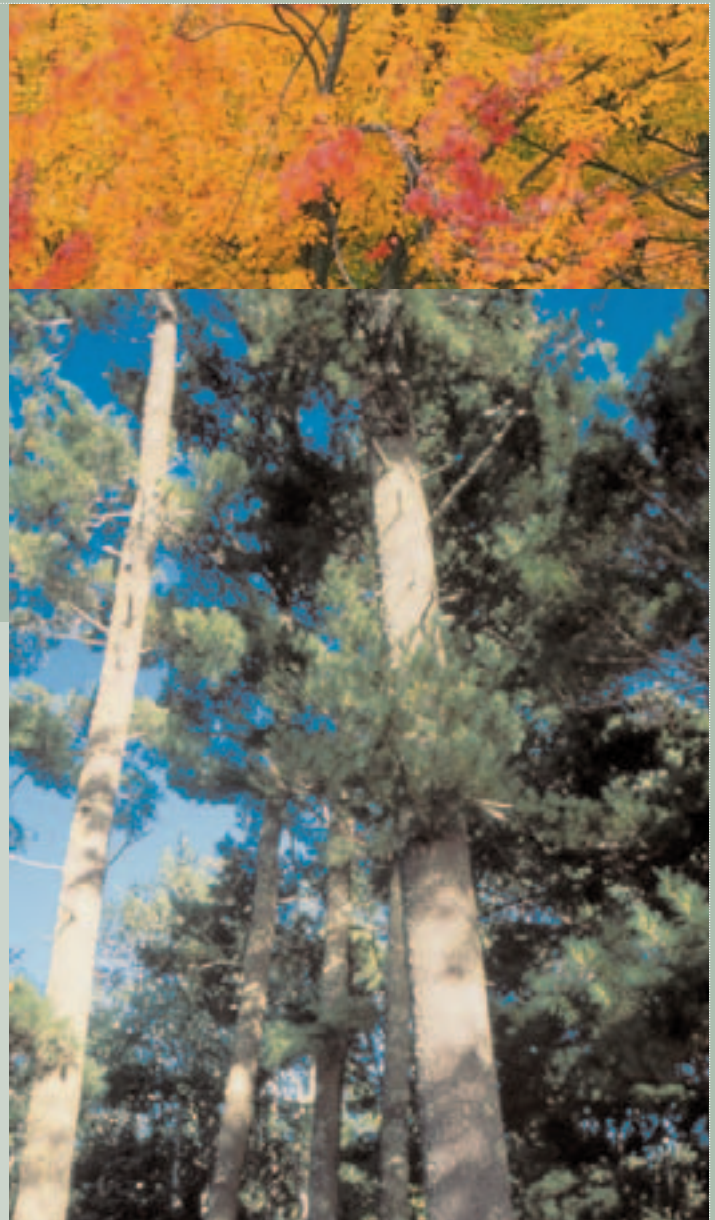
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